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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

25

R E A D S



175
OCT

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Owing to the peculiarities of working far enough ahead to go to San Diego as well as do the two week UK Tour (it's still going to be a tight fit; if 174 got to you late, it means we miscalculated), I'm writing this Note mere hours after finishing the one for 174 and writing the letters page answers for that one. After I finish this, I have to pick the letters for this issue's Aardvark Comment and do the answers. I've already got the Victor Reid text pieces written, but I have yet to even start on the drawing end of things. This really doesn't have anything to do with anything, but, hey, you bitch about your job, don't you?

One of the biggest problems with what I'm doing here is trying to strike a balance between addressing all of the people who are starting to self-publish, the ones who want to start, and the ones who have only drawn five comic book pages in their entire life. This one is going to be in the category of advanced reading for most of you, but here goes.

Creativity comes before business. I learned that a long time ago, but I forget that it's a natural mistake to make. I've only been reminded because of the time I've been able to spend with Martin, James, Jeff and Colleen in the last while. One of the commonest complaints was how much time the business side of self-publishing was occupying in their lives. When the roof over your head is at stake, you do tend to take business correspondence seriously, to say the least. The most important thing to remember is that you want to spend most of your time writing and drawing and as little time as possible doing the necessary business side. Everyone solves this problem a different way. For Colleen, the solution was to start her day with the creative end and at a specific point to start dealing with the business side. For Martin, it was a matter of making Sunday business day and working very hard to make sure that, when it does spill over into Monday, that it devours as little of that day as possible. Mail is a big problem. Everyone likes to get mail and self-publishers are lucky in that most of their mail is interesting (big, fat distributor cheques being especially interesting). The best thing to do is to allot a certain amount of time for mail and stick to it. The mail at Aardvark Vanahelm is divided by Gerhard. He takes care of the business mail, and I take care of Aardvark Comment, promotion, Campaign '93 and such-like. Since a starting self-publisher is going to have to deal with everything that comes in, they have to be merciless. Letters page mail, cheques, business problems that need to be fixed, and limited (LIMITED) personal correspondence. Jeff Smith was having a particular problem with this. He had a whole boxful of mail that he hadn't been able to get to. And when he did sit down to answer it, he would run up against That Letter. That Letter is the one you'd like to answer, but you don't know where to begin, so you just sit there staring at it for a half hour or so. As I told him, you throw those away. Bad ju-ju. Green kryptonite. (As a matter of fact I confessed to him that the last time I got way behind on my mail, I just threw the whole pile away and started from square one. I think I got three letters against why I hadn't replied). You don't owe your fans and readers a personal reply. You owe them the next issue of your book. You are also not a pen-pal. If someone writes you a nice letter and you write them back, you are not obligated to strike up a years-long correspondence of Victorian proportions. If they get offended, so what? Same thing when people send you gifts or copies of their work. They aren't your grandmother. If you've got time, thank them. If you don't, do your next page.

If mail is an annoyance, the telephone is the enemy. Give people exactly as much time as you want to and not a second more. A simple 'Listen, I'm sorry, but I have to get this issue done' should suffice. If it doesn't, hang up on 'em. Learn to talk on the phone and work at the same time. There are plenty of brainless things you can do on a page and talk at the same time. Writing, layout and lettering, no. Tight pencilling, inking noodly details or filling in blacks, yes. Unplug your phone if you really need to concentrate (again, writing, layout, composition). Don't give me that 'what if there's an emergency?' That's what we have hospitals, cops and fire departments for (also non-self-publishing friends and relatives).

The binding element here is that writing and drawing have to come first. A double plus priority. Leave . . . me . . . ALONE. There is no question that the phone is the instrument of the devil insofar as self-publishing is concerned. I work every weekend that I'm not at a con or a signing and I will not answer the phone. There are times when it will ring every five minutes for eight hours. If you can't ignore a ringing telephone every five minutes for eight hours, you have a destructive addiction that definitely hurts your chances of ever being able to self-publish successfully.

Coolest thing I got in San Diego: a copy of Russell Calabrese's 1990 CD COMICS. An anthology comic (I swear I'm not making this up) packaged in a CD box. 24 Air Raid Wardens and footlocker, a micro mini comic and rainy day activities. If you have a spare ten bucks lying around, send it to Russell Calabrese, HI-TEST PRODUCTIONS, 17178 Chatsworth St. #2, Granada Hills, CA 91344. Trust me.

CEREBUS

NO. 175

OCTOBER 1993

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

**MOTHERS
&
DAUGHTERS**
a novel

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to
Cerebus 162)
Flight

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to
Cerebus 174)
Women

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to
Cerebus 188)

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 189 to
Cerebus 200)

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book three
reads



NO.

I'M NOT HERE
TO TAKE YOUR
THRONE.

I HAD MY FILL
OF THRONES MANY
LIFETIMES AGO...

YOU
READ MY
MIND AND WHAT
YOU SEE IS A
SIMPLE PERSON

WHO HAS
SPENT HIS
ADULT LIFE

PLAYING
CHESS WITH
HIMSELF

IN THE
LOWER
CITY...

YOU EXPECTED A MONSTER,
DIDN'T YOU? A BLACK
MAGICIAN WHO SETS
FIRE, CONJURES DRAGONS,
AND SEEMS TO WIPEST YOUR
POWER FROM YOU...

THAT "SVENTUS PO" IS THE ILLUSION,
CREATED AND
SUSTAINED BY
YOU ALONE

I, ON THE OTHER HAND
EXPECTED TO FIND A
DESPOTIC QUEEN, INSULATED,
ISOLATED... NEUTRALIZED
BY HER Pawns...

IMPOTENT.

INEFFECTIVE.

CHOKING ON
HER PENT-
UP RAGE

AND?

HERE
YOU ARE



TRUTH AND
ILLUSION, ORIN

TRUTH IS WHAT
REMAINS WHEN ALL
ILLUSIONS HAVE
BEEN STRIPPED
AWAY...

THAT IS THE
ANSWER TO
THE QUESTION
WHICH
ECH'D'S

AND
RE-FLASHES
WITHIN
THESE WALLS

THAT IS
TRUTH.

THE
'ENDGAME'
HAS BEGUN

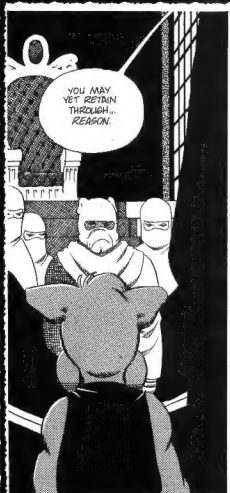
EITHER UNDER YOUR
TELEPATHIC ORDERS
...OR OF THEIR OWN
VOLITION...YOUR GUARDS
ARE ABOUT TO ATTACK
US...

ASTORIA AND
I WILL DIE
QUICKLY...

CEREBUS WILL
THEN CUT THE
FIVE OF YOU
DOWN...IN COLD
BLOOD...WITHOUT
BREAKING A
SWEAT...

UNITING THE
EASTERN AND
WESTERN
CHURCHES

UNDER HIS
ABSOLUTE AND
UNDISPUTED
RULE...



AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dave,

When they first made love, it transcended any feeling, any emotion that she had ever felt before. The had both waited so long, holding back from this eventuality for the past few weeks they'd been fighting against it — trying to keep each to themselves — the fears of past rejections still clouding their memories, and it was only now that those fears slowly melted into a soft hesitancy — life moved into half speed as every breath takes a light year, every movement a mile and his touch feels like fire on your skin and all the time your heart is beating, beating, beating, faster than it can and all you can do is die in his eyes as you wait for the glance of his lips upon yours.

The boy moved away, startled by the strength of his own cravings — his body lean and trembling with the hunger that could only be fed by her flesh. His hesitancy struck a fear in her heart — a reminder of lovers past who had not been so hesitant, except when it mattered — she leaned forwards and gently brushed away his hair.

With her touch, he looked up.

He held her captive with his eyes, slowly swimming, kissing blindly in a river, reeds wrapped around her legs, slowly sinking as he moved closer, closer now and he kissed straight into her soul, and the waters getting higher, drowning now; his eyes are green and his eyes are brown and his tongue is deep within her, his hands moving softly — velvet kittens playing upon her skin, palest white against the gaudy leopard skin covers, an innocence framed by a backdrop of debauchery and she feels like heaven.

They undress; themselves, each other.

For the briefest second they regard each other with awe — then discover. What feels good, what

feels better. To him she seems incredible — no other woman had ever released the joy of a truly sensual sexual experience like this to him, and the emotions aroused and terrified him as he found himself floundering beneath the waves of power absorbed through his body and into hers.

She held him close, clasped close to her breast and held closer inside her. Without moving she could feel him and the sudden intimacy and vulnerability brought a sob to her throat. She buried her head into his hair and they began to move together. She pushed him down on the bed and held his shoulders as he struggled beneath her — she enjoyed to play, trying to twist a string of suitors round her little finger looking for the pearl among the pack, but always the chain broke, links so loosely held by mere physical attraction, and she was on her own again. She never believed she had learned sexual technique — she just enjoyed it but was constantly searching for something more. Very few of her sexual liaisons meant anything to her. She felt no great passion for them and they aroused no great passion in her either — she had truly loved twice and mistaken lust and infatuation a great many times. The feelings she felt now, as this beautiful creature, with a mind she had grown to love when she felt his body unobtainable, were consuming and overwhelming. She couldn't fight him any more, she could not deny her own soul, so she fell forwards into his arms and they moved sideways as he pulled her to him more wantingly, she clasped around him sinking herself into him, holding him closer still until the air went quiet and the white noise heat exploding in the sun was crashing down — flames like beats of their hearts burning through their skin piercing them both together united in the glow as the embers blew down.

And he didn't move — he stayed

close to her, not even leaving her now, kissing the soft skin of her shoulder as she gently traced a fingertip along the line of his hip bone, until gradually they moved away, suddenly holding together for fear that they should come too far apart. Sleep engulfed them and she dreamed of kissing in a river, reeds wrapped around her legs and body, a warm feeling enveloping her as she awoke in his arms.

And the hours turned to days and she loved him.

And the days turned to months and she still loved him.

And as the months turned around and became a year he left her too but she could find no wrong in his actions, no blackness to mark his memory and she still loved him.

Nephelia

Man, I don't know why, but this letter makes me feel really, really guilty.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'm not sure when I fell in love with *Cerebus*. I don't even buy that many comics during the year. The only comics I have that mean so much to me they share space on my bookshelf with Nabokov, Kazantzakis and D.H. Lawrence are by Frank Miller (*Hard Boiled* and *The Dark Knight Returns*) and ALL the *Cerebus Phone Books* including my recently purchased *Flight*.

I don't know. *Cerebus* is cool. Very few comic heroes (can we call him that?) seem as brave, strong-willed, and realistic. (Indeed his crankiness, argumentativeness, and unapologetic ability to say 'No' make him, to me at least, more real and more human than any of *Cerebus's* contemporaries.) I congratulate you on creating (finally) a literate comic with a highly complex and fascinating hero.

You may not have time, but I do have some pertinent questions about *Cerebus* . . . perhaps some you've answered a million times and I've been out of ear shot. But I am really interested to know:

1. I love *Cerebus's* name. What does it mean and where did it come from? Would it be either goofy or a copyright infringement if I used it for the name of my first born son?
2. I know the plan is to have *Cerebus* (sniff) die in the last

issue, but after that what will happen to your publishing company? (or is Aardvark Vanaheim Inc. technically something else?) When this is over are you going to get out of comics altogether, develop a new set of characters or give the surviving ensemble their own saga?

3. If *Cerebus* ever became a movie or animated series, (I'm not sure if that's a good idea or not — I like him better on paper), what would *Cerebus*'s voice sound like? I keep thinking George C. Scott. Or how about Sean Connery?

That's all I was curious of (outside of how you guys avoid Carpal Tunnel Syndrome — or however you spell it — after all that drawing and writing.).

Keep up the extraordinary work and thanks for your time.

Peace,
James Cagney
Oakland, CA

P.S. I just thought of another question . . . Dave, what do you do about writer's block?

1. Well it wouldn't be copyright infringement. I'm not sure how the kid would feel about it, but I think it would be great if I could tell people that James Cagney named his kid after my aardvark.

2. Aardvark Vanaheim will continue to keep the *Cerebus* reprint volumes in print after 2004 (*Cerebus: The Complete Story*) as well as publishing the comic stories, graphic novels and what-not that I produce after that time. I very much doubt that I will do anything with the *Cerebus* characters after issue 300 (hey, enough is enough), I doubt that I will create any new continuing characters and I KNOW that I will never, ever do a monthly title again. After Gerhard is done sailing around the world a few times, I hope he'll be interested in doing the backgrounds on the new stuff.

3. If *Cerebus* was ever animated (which would have to be in a parallel universe or Earth-2 or something), his voice would be done by George C. Scott (unless the George C. Scott of Earth-2 sounded like Pee Wee Herman).

P.S. The great thing about writing the same story for sixteen years is that you don't get writer's block; it's more like holding back writer's flood.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

This is an apology.

Recently, I was asked to contribute to a project which consists of 'celebrities' choosing their ten favourite novels of the Twentieth Century. Being on the fringes of the writing establishment (ie. various pieces have appeared here and there, but nothing substantial has yet been published), I have been placed on the celebrity 'list' (very near, if not at, the bottom — after a whole bunch of other people that you've never heard of) and so, every now and then, I get invited to some bash with dreadful wine or asked to give an opinion on something I couldn't care a damn about or, as in this case, contribute something to help pad out an article or book.

Along with John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and Vonnegut's *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, I included Dave Sim's *Cerebus: Jaka's Story* — which, for some perverse reason (and despite the terrible punctuation), is one of my ten favourite works. Not ten great, not ten most important, not ten most influential, but ten favourite. That's what they guy asked for; that's what I gave him.

Two weeks later, I get a letter. The compiler has never heard of *Jaka's Story* and cannot find it on any publishing list. Please could I contact him and give him a brief summary, as he wishes to include outlines of the novels in the project.

Thinking that here's a chance to introduce someone to something wonderful, I give the guy a call. The reason why he couldn't find *Jaka's Story*, I explain, is because it originally appeared in an ongoing series of comics. However, it has since been republished in a single volume. Go to any good comic store and they'll have a copy.

Having said all this, I am now expecting the guy to ask me what it's all about. I've already formed in my head how to get past the initial resistance that's going to occur when he learns that the 'hero' is a talking aardvark. You know the sort of thing. "What it's *actually* about is blah, blah, blah (don't forget to mention that it's also very funny) and that *Jaka's Story* in particular is about blah, blah, blah."

But, no. This man's next sentence is, "So . . . it's a comic."

"Yes," I say.

"Not a novel."

"Well, yes it is," I reply, beginning to get a bad feeling about this. "It's a comic and a novel."

"In your opinion."

I'm not definitely getting a bad feeling. "Obviously," I say. "Otherwise I wouldn't have included it in my list."

There's a pause. "I'm sorry," he says, "but a novel is a novel. It's not a book with pictures."

"Oh," I say, "so *Breakfast of Champions* isn't a novel. *Alice in Wonderland* isn't a novel. After all, they're both books with pictures."

"That's not what I meant. What I meant was, a novel has text."

"*Jaka's Story* does have text."

"So, it's not a comic, then."

"Yes," I say, despairingly. "It is a comic. It has text and it has pictorial panels with speech balloons."

There is a long pause, then this . . . person says, "I don't mean to cause offence, and I will go and look at this *Jaka's Story*, but for the purposes of this project, I would rather have novels that everyone recognizes as novels. So would you mind choosing a replacement for this work?"

Now I'm angry. "Yes, I would bloody mind! — because what you're really saying is that *Jaka's Story* cannot be considered as a work of equal standing to a 'traditional' novel simply because it's told in a comic format. Well, I don't accept that — so you either include it in the list or you don't publish my list at all!"

"I see," says the guy. "Well, in that case, thank you for all your time and trouble, but I don't think we will use the material you sent."

I'm sorry, Dave. I should have been more patient with the guy. I doubt that it would have brought many (if any) new readers to your work, and — let's face it — I was only a space-filler anyway, but it would have been nice to have had *Jaka's Story* in the book. I blew it.

There is a coda, however. I was so mad after this conversation that I rung two friends of mine who had also been asked to contribute. One of them is a major celebrity. Both have subsequently withdrawn their contributions. Petty, I know — but I didn't half feel better for it!

May you go from strength to strength — and here's hoping that the little turd's project gets cancelled!

Yours,

Mark Kirwan-Hayhoe
London, England

P.S. I love your work. Been reading it for years. No one else is doing anything like it in scope or range — and I doubt if anyone could. It is truly unique: an intelligent, witty, adult piece of fiction that is consistently of a high standard. That it is read by thousands rather than millions only goes to show we are sinking under a sea of mediocrity, where anything not fitting into an accepted niche does not get the chance to shine. Well, what can you expect from a system as fucked up as ours?

The money would be nice, as well.

Remember, they laughed at Charlie Chaplin, as well. Oh, wait. They were supposed to laugh at Charlie Chaplin, weren't they? Now, I've forgotten what my point was. Oh, yeah! Thanks for sticking up for Jaka's Story. I appreciate it.

★★★★★★★★★

Hey Colin,

You misspelled my name. It's "Zaft", not "Zoft". Did you know that Maurice and Lynn got married? And Katie's in India! Pretty wild, huh? Do you keep in touch with Richard? Sue does, but she's in Japan right now. So when did you move to Chicago? If you get a chance, go see the *Vulgar Boatmen* — they're an incredible band.

Considering himself paged,

Dave Zaft
815 Lawrence, #2
Ann Arbor, MI
USA 48104

P.S. Is it just me, or do a lot of Aardvark Comment-ers live in Ann Arbor?

P.P.S. When one is paged in a letters column, where does one go?

P.P.P.S. Next time I promise to write only regarding the (wonderful) story. (Hi Dave!, Hi Ger!)

Sorry guys. I hit the 'public address' button by accident, instead of 'line one-page'. Good thing you didn't have anything really embarrassing to say, eh?

★★★★★★★★★

Hey Dave,

My girlfriend, Gail, is from Chicago, so we had been talking about taking a trip there. She wanted to visit her family and we both have friends there. I sneakily planned the trip for the July 4th weekend, then casually mentioned that I would probably spend a day at the Chicago Comicon. She thought that was fine, but was surprised that I was actually excited about it.

When I got back from the convention, she, trying to show interest in my hobby, asked what I had gotten. I showed her *Flaming Carrot* #27 signed by Bob Burden: No interest. I tried the *Guest of Honor* — Neil Gaiman book signed by Neil: No interest. *Hero's Madman Premiere Edition* signed by Mike Allred: No interest. *Cerebus* #0 with a Jaka sketch by you in it: No interest (I know Dave, Blasphemy). As a last ditch effort I showed her some minicomics I had purchased from Scott McCloud. She flipped through three by Scott with mild interest. Then she got to Matt Feazell's *Understanding Minicomics*, which Scott had also sold me. "Hmmm, stick people," she said. She read it and actually chuckled a few times.

Since then I have told her about *Bone* and said I was going to show that to her. "Do you have any more stick people?" is her response. So now I'm going to send a few bucks to Matt Feazell and see if he'll send me any more minicomics. So that's my advice to anyone who has tried, unsuccessfully, to convince their girlfriends (friends, parents, whomever) that comics aren't idiotic, by showing them *Cerebus*, *Sandman* and *Bone*. Try something with stick people. It's worth a shot.

Jeffrey J. Stoltman
821 E. 5th St.
Winona, MN
USA 55987

Just as I always suspected. Cynicalman is the doorway to comic book credibility in the Real World. Brum. Ert.

★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

While mulling over *Cerebus* #172, I came across a letter by Brian Zatkow which struck a chord in me; for it sounded like my experience with your work. As one of many who thought they wouldn't write for Aardvark

Comment, I now feel bitten by my muse to tell my story.

I first came in contact with *Cerebus* on a trip to Florida with my college buddy, Tony, in 1989. He brought along the phone books of *High Society*, and *Church & State I and II*. I still recall reading #26, the first installment of *High Society*, and, knowing NOTHING of *Cerebus*' character, laughing like crazy that this aardvark could not find anyone to pick a fight with!! I was enthralled with the caricatures (Groucho/Lord Julius, Elrod/ Foghorn Leghorn, Mick and Keef, Cleese, Rodney, etc.), and my theological interests were piqued by the whole plot of *Church & State*, particularly your cosmology and eschatology in the ascension issues.

I left my initial experience at that. Almost like a nice first date that one doesn't follow up on. In 1990, I found *Cerebus* (The phone book compiling #1-25) at the comic shop in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, and in February of 1991, I was bitten by the bug big time. I had to know what happened to this furry little guy left alone in #111. So, I went to the local shops around my native Cleveland, Ohio, and picked up all the back issues I could find. In one day, I had all of *Jaka's Story*, a good chunk of *Church & State*, and a few *High Society*. Not reprints, mind you, but the originals. Thus began the quest for all of the original books. With the help of my travels through Dayton, Ohio; Houston, Texas (where I found an original, first printing #1), Orlando and Kissimmee, Florida; Laurel, Maryland; and ending in Akron, Ohio (where one simple phone call netted issues #2-5), my collection became complete in August, 1992. I am quite unfamiliar with the comic business, so I wonder how much of an accomplishment it is to dig up 14 years of past printing in 19 months. It wasn't without cost — my ex-non-exclusive (what an adjective!) girlfriend, Tricia, in Dayton now hates *Cerebus* because of my having her drive me to all of the shops in that area!

And to respond to Brian Zatkow's pondering of possible "*Cerebus* withdrawal," I have since found *Bone* (thanks to you, Dave) as another comic worthy of my collecting. For \$4 a month (between these two titles), this is a very cheap hobby. Hey, my roommate in college used to dump \$20 a week on all sorts of Marvel & DC titles! And since I will be

taking a vow of poverty in my new life, this is a menial expense.

Speaking as a Catholic studying for the priesthood, I found nothing "sacrilegious" about Pope Cerebus. We're a liberal lot here, and we're not about to deny the problems with the papacy. To say it is that bad NOW would be wrong, but there were historical screw-ups (no pun intended). And those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it... (But do watch out for the Pre-Vatican II Catholics, the ones who still go to Latin Mass? They might tar and feather you!!!!)

Do keep up the fine work, Dave. I have already found a shop here in our nation's Capital to keep up with *Cerebus*; and wherever I am sent, I plan to stay with you until #300. Then I may have to sell or give away the whole lot. Vow of poverty, you know — I'm sure your work will only appreciate in the next decade. Or perhaps I'll simply donate it to one of our Carmelite libraries. Future generations of young Catholic men and women should be able to draw inspiration from your genius. And appreciate typical Groucho humor. Oh, did I mention I also infuriated Tricia by renting half a dozen Marx brothers films and subjecting her to a weekend film fest? Comic books and videos; no wonder I am taking a vow of celibacy!!!!

Take care,

Christopher J. Kulig
1600 Webster St. NE
Washington, D.C.
USA 20017-3145

By the time March 2004 rolls around, I might just be ready for a six month Introspection Tour of various seminars. No autographs, no head-sketches, no interviews. Just daily devotions and manual labour. All you Cerebus fans studying for the priesthood: start putting a good word in for me now, right? Right.

★★★★★★★★★

Hey Dave,

Well, there I was reading my *Cerebus* back issues (*Mothers & Daughters* to be exact) and I stumbled on a letter from Matt in England (*Cerebus* #164).

Matt, you have a really valid point. The thing that sets me off also is organizations like the NAACP. The National Association for the Advancement of Color People? Come on now folks! If I started an organization called the National

Association for the Advancement of White People (the NAAWP!) people would shout "Racists!" In fact there are such organizations: The Klu Klux Klan (what a silly name), the various Aryan Fronts, etc. People look at these groups with disgust. Rightly so, because they are racist groups. What about the NAACP then? Isn't it racist? Yes, it is!

Then you have these National History Months: Hispanic history month, women's history month, Native American history month, ad nauseum! First, if we were to start white men's history month most people would start screaming (in a whiney tone of voice) "But white males already dominate history enough. They don't need a month!" True enough, but is a month all the history that other cultures and peoples deserve? It would be nice to see these national history months over with and one combined history taught. We have twelve years to teach kids history. I think we can incorporate a multitude of cultures in those twelve years. If you want to specialize in one culture, feel free to do so. Don't, however, feel that everyone should learn every crushing detail of that culture's history.

History is taught from the eyes of the majority, whatever culture/ethnic group/people are the majority. Case in point — growing up in New England I was taught "The North" won the US Civil War. Well, now that I've been down south (I lived in Hampton, VA for a year. Not really that far south, but for a New England Yankee like me it's The South) and met people from the south some of whom say the south won. Oh, Lee might have surrendered but they won the war. I presume (please correct me if I'm wrong) in other places this is true also. Say for instance in China. They are probably taught the Chinese view of history and not, say, a "Hispanic" view of history. Yes, "credit" should be given where due, but people are going to be told the history of their people.

>Sigh<

As for *Cerebus* Dave, *Mothers & Daughters* is going great! Some of the stuff is so funny (a drunk Cerebus looking for Missy, but she's on his head) and some is so depressing (Posey's death). I think this is your best work (so far). You just keep getting better and better. I can't wait to see what is coming

up. Really!

And hey, Gerhard, your doing a great job on the backgrounds and inking. Have a drink on me!

Thanks for listening to me ramble on so. I hope this sees print, because I'd like other peoples' views on this reverse discrimination.

Uncontrollably myself,

Margaret R. Tucker
HHC LEA MPC
Unit 1323, Box 527
APO AA 34004-5000

P.S.: (I can't help myself!) For a good read check out *Reflections on the Art of Living*, a Joseph Campbell Companion edited by Diane K. Osbon.

Maybe we could just have eight history teachers for every classroom representing all points of view simultaneously. They could even be mud-wrestling at the same time and shouting through bullhorns. I bet we could get the kids through the system in half the time.

★★★★★★★★★

Hi Dave, Hi Ger,

It's Independence Day here, and it seems like the perfect time to address your response to Howard Shum's letter in #171. I agree that they key word in your economic plan is "global." We're rapidly reaching the point where, because of ever-growing interdependence, national economies are going to cease being viable concepts. For all the concern (justified, at least in part) that a single currency system in Europe will result in German economic domination, the conversion to a single currency system (not just in Europe, but worldwide) is probably the smartest way to make some sense out of a hopelessly muddled situation.

And *that*, boys and girls, is a run-on sentence.

But seriously, if the terms are simplified into something everybody can understand, wouldn't it make it that much easier to know who has what, who needs what, etc.? Yes, Germany and Japan are going to have the most and thus, the most control, but hey, wake up. They *already* have control.

About your idea to just go ahead and print enough of the unified currency to wipe the slate clean for debtors and creditors, I don't know. As I understand it, and I

could be wrong, isn't money basically a promissory note that the scraps of paper could be redeemed for gold, silver, whatever standard a country's economy rests on? Not that anybody ever actually goes to the bank and asks to have their paycheck converted into gold bars, but if there simply isn't enough of the standard, printing money is a worthless exercise. I may have the particulars messed up, but you can't just print money if there's nothing behind it to give it value.

By the way, is there such an animal as a creditor nation anymore, on a net basis? We're all into each other somehow, and if my country is owed X by your country, I probably owe that country over there enough to be considered a net debtor.

The whole discussion reminds me of a Dennis Miller joke. Miller talks about the US debt being this ever-growing, tremendous, trillion-dollar amount, then wonders why countries and banks still insist on lending us money. If it were him, he says, "First couple of hundred billion, yeah, I'll go to the wall for a pal. But if you owe me a couple tril, I gotta see something, man, a deuce, a note from your doctor, *something*."

As for your comments about women and government, I assume there are plenty of men in politics who would visit their sick parents at "critical junctures," but because they're not Astor . . . er, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the press probably isn't quite as interested.

Thanks for *Cerebus Number Zero*. It seems to me this is a better idea than the *Free Cerebus* idea of a few years back in that it gives people a chance to experience the feel of actual issues, rather than just individual panels. It also, through your introductions, gives readers a chance to hear your actual voice. When I was starting my *Cerebus* collection, your *Swords* introductions helped sell me on the title.

As far as funny lines in #51 go, I always liked the "veiled threat/hooded boob" bit.

Gotta go watch fireworks.

Best,

Adam Beechen
3206 King St., #204
Austin, TX
USA 78705

Well, I think once the U.S. went off of the gold standard and the merit of the various currencies became strictly relative, for good

or ill we dropped (as a global community) even the pretence that money was based on *anything*. 'What country is lying the least about how hopeless their situation is economically,' seems to be the 'endgame'. The U.S. has the Midwest flooding, the S&L crisis, Germany has the East German fiasco hanging around its neck, Canada has Socialist Ontario, Separatist Quebec and a national debt many times higher than the rest of the G-7 on a per capita basis, Japan has all of the debt-riddled corporations and empty office buildings they acquired during the Reagan hallucination. Every day all of the countries gang up on somebody in the G-7 and whoever it is has to dump billions of dollars (or francs or pounds) into the money markets to 'shore up' their currency. I say let's print up seven shiny new one hundred trillion dollar bills and hand them out to the fucking lunatics running the seven national banks and call it a day.

On the subject of Astor . . . er Hillary Rodham Clinton, I stand by my original point. Fourteen days sitting at someone's bedside at the beginning of a new administration is political suicide on a scale that makes Jimmy Carter's 1976 Rose Garden campaign look like JFK's 1960 strategy for the Primaries. Sic semper feminis.

★★★★★★★★

Dave,

More coffee break reading material. Hope you like it.

Your discussion of self-publishing these days is turning into quite an interesting little how-to book. I was surprised to see you printing another article on the subject by one of those editor people. I was under the impression you thought they were all part of the problem.

Blargga,

Shane Simmons
733 43rd Avenue
Lachine, Quebec
Canada H8T 2J5

Guilty until proven innocent. Gary Reed's article was one of the most helpful and concise I have ever seen. If Dan Quayle would've sent in the same guide, I would've printed it. Something helpful is something helpful. Period.

What do you mean, you've never heard of Shane Simmons? He's one of my favourite cartoonists in the universe. Send him a cheque

and he'll send you some great mini-comics. Big cheque, little cheque (everywhere a cheque-cheque); he has no pride, but he does have great mini-comics, envelopes and stamps. What are you waiting for?

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

1. Would you please start printing some details of your current failed/doomed relationship situation, like you used to in the good old days? That used to be quite funny.
2. Would you please start printing some funny letters, like you used to in the good old days? They used to be quite funny also.
3. Have you ever considered elbowing the art and the story and just running a 30-page *Cerebus* pen-pal magazine each month? I think you could make some money on this.

Yours sincerely,

Martin McDonagh
3 Medlar Street
London SE50JU
England

1. Coming right up in *Cerebus* 182 through 186; Dave Sim, the bitter romantic names names. You think I'm kidding? Just wait. You'll see.

2. You mean 'unlike this one'?

3. Sure and I could call it *Cerebus Forum*. Fill it with sexual fantasies that sound plausible to anyone who has never had sex, but have heard really good things about it. Mmm. Nah.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I just bought this lovely old typewriter and decided to try it out by writing a letter to my friendly neighbourhood aardvark. I'm a very recent initiate of the Cult of *Cerebus*, plunging into this titanic work with issue 165 (though since then I've read *Flight*, so I'm not completely lost as to what's going on).

I was going to launch into a big mythopsychological analyses of *Mothers & Daughters* so far, but I haven't quite figured it all out yet. Here are a few thoughts on the novel's storyline so far:

Universal mythological symbolism is here in abundance. The mountain, psychologically, is a

phallic symbol, but mythologically, it is much more. It becomes the axis mundi, the fountain of energy, the cosmological centre of the universe. It's growth and subsequent destruction of the Regency Hotel is the overflow of male energy that is being replaced by the Cirinists. Cerebus himself is a conduit for this energy which is personified in Tarin.

Of course, I could be wrong. I'm sure it will all become clear when I read the rest of the phone books.

Yes, the Matriarchist / Feminist agenda can be very dangerous. So, Dave, is Kim Campbell a Cirinist?

Wondering how long this old machine will last,

Chris S. Cosco
649 Queens Ave. (rear)
London, Ontario
Canada
N5W 3H2

Kim Campbell? Our new beloved PM? Voting and legislation record is Cirnist all-the-way. To the left of Margaret Thatcher (but, then, Nancy Reagan was to the left of Margaret Thatcher). Twice divorced and no kids might fool the unwary that she's a Kevillist. Remember when the radio call-in show guy asked her about her love-life? She said she kept checking her calendar for hanky-panky but there's no room for it. Hanky-panky. The term is so Cirinist it ovulates.

Watch for more populist, touchy-feely crap through the campaign and then Iron Lady II (Rambo Peep Has Lost Her Sheep and She's Going In To Get Them). You heard it here first, folks.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

While I can generally sympathize with the tone of your latest Note from the President #172 (there's really no need to guilt-trip our fellow cartoonists about doing work-made-for-hire), I think you may have come back a little too far in the opposite direction. Your analogy of freelancing to a "cool and relaxing dip in a swimming pool" renders the situation as misleadingly innocuous. I have known many who have gone for a dip in that seemingly placid pool. A few drowned, over-estimating their ability to swim; others broke their necks from the dive off the board; and many were at least badly sunburnt,

floating around on their cushy inflatable lounge chairs far too long. I myself suffered a stingingly persistent case of swimmer's ear, which acts up every time I take a shower.

Warnings about freelance work-made-for-hire can never be overstated. A man cannot serve two masters, and all of that. It has been my experience that prestige and the really top rates are only bestowed on those who commit to them totally. Those who steadfastly maintain at least a certain amount of independence, but who must nonetheless submit to freelance in order to keep their head above water (there's that analogy again) are consigned to a kind of purgatory of "beginner's rates" and the least prestigious shitwork imaginable. And they love nothing better than to seduce an independent creator — just enough to trip up the good thing they have going, then abandon them.

(To clue one and all in, I am referring to my *Wasteland* period of freelancing, named for the aptly-titled DC book of circa 1987, but which actually encompasses my "Valley of the Shadow of Death" period, working for Gary Groth on *King Kong* and the *Eros/Anton Dreik* titles 1990-92. For the record, my working for Rob Liefeld, whom you mention by name, was for me not so much a cool and relaxing dip so much as a major shot in the arm. However, anyone craving prestige should ask me about my experience with Rick Veitch on 1963 some time.)

Sincerely,

Don Simpson
Pittsburgh, PA

Misleadingly innocuous. Nice way of saying 'Hey, Dave, knock it off with the Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm routine; you're not fooling anybody.' Right you are, Don.

Speaking of misleadingly innocuous, what was it like working with Rick Veitch on 1963? I mean, I've known both you and Rick for years and years and years. I imagine you boys must've got on like a house on fire. Is that what it was like? Did you boys get on just like a house on fire?

★★★★★★★★

DAVE SIM PERSONAL APPEARANCES

1993

OCTOBER 2, 3
DEARBORN, MICHIGAN
Motor City Con.

NOVEMBER 26
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Central City Comics

NOVEMBER 27, 28
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Mid-Ohio Con.

DECEMBER 11
KITCHENER, ONTARIO
Now & Then Books

1994

with
GERHARD

SAN JUAN CONVENTION

JANUARY 15, 16
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO
Gran Salon
Convention Center

OZCON III
FEBRUARY 4-6
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
Park Lane Hotel
161 Elizabeth Street

A CEREBUS PREVIEW

You'll all be happy to hear that Colin Upton (last seen in these pages in *Cerebus* 138) is as prolific as ever. Here's a complete list of the titles available (and their prices) from one of the certified Kings of Mini-Comics. Send check or money order to Colin Upton, 6424 Chester, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5W 3C3.

40¢ COMICS

Happy Ned 1-8
Jam of Spot 1-4
Self-indulgent 1-12
Famous Bus Rides 1-4
Real Rubbie 1-6
Loonyboy 1, 2
Tales of the Terrible
Tea Totaller - 1
Noble Art of Observing
People 1
Tales of the Devilbunnies - 1
Happy Hater 1-4
Captain Rugdoctor 1, 2
You're Young, It's Dark,
Your Bladder's Full - 1
Self-Portrait Comics - 1

50¢ COMICS

Socialist Turtle 1-7
Granville Street
Gallery 1-7
Life of a Cartoon
Artiste - 1

75¢ COMICS

Canadian Squalour - 1

\$1.25 COMICS

Buddha on the Road 1, 2
Hotyha The Albanian - 1
Artistic License - 1

\$25.00

for the complete
mini-comic collection,
not including
Big Thing
or
Saga of Happy Ned.

Colin Upton's <i>Big Thing</i> 0	(Independent)	\$3.25 U.S.	\$4.50 CAN.
Colin Upton's <i>Big Thing</i> 1	(Fantagraphics)	\$2.75 U.S.	\$3.50 CAN.
Colin Upton's <i>Big Thing</i> 2,3	(Fantagraphics)	\$2.25 U.S.	\$2.75 CAN.
Colin Upton's <i>Big Thing</i> 4	(Fantagraphics)	\$2.50 U.S.	\$2.95 CAN.
Colin Upton's <i>Big Thing</i> 5	(Independent)	\$2.50 U.S.	\$2.00 CAN.
<i>Big Thing</i> Reprint Collection	(Independent)	\$2.50 U.S.	\$2.00 CAN.
The collected <i>Happy Ned</i> , 2nd Edition soon from Jabber Wocky Graphics		\$1.75 U.S.	

And now, Colin Upton's 'Chris'.

CHRIS

"ALL MEN ARE RAPISTS
AND THATS ALL THAT THEY ARE ..."

-THE WOMENS ROOM
MARILYN FRENCH









IT'S OKAY CHRIS!
WE'RE ALL
FRIENDS
HERE!

YEAH,
TELL US
WHAT YOU
DID IN
SCHOOL
TODAY.



WELL, UH, AH... RIGHT
NOW I'M WORKING ON
A PHOTO ESSAY ON
THE WAY WOMEN ARE
PORTRAYED IN
ADVERTISING AND
SUCH, BUT I'M STILL
WORKING ON THE
CONCEPT...

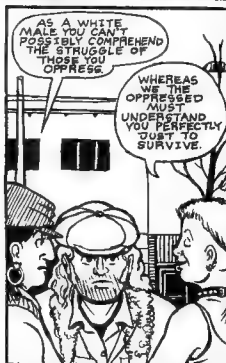
OH GOD
NOT
ANOTHER
ONE!

YOU'RE
NOT QUALIFIED.



QUALIFIED?
HOW DO YOU
MEAN?

SIGH! CHRIS, DO I HAVE
TO EXPLAIN YOU MEN
SO-CALLED ARTISTS HAVE
BEEN EXPLOITING BODIES
OF WOMYN FOR CENTURIES
EVER SINCE THE DESTRUCTION
OF THE GODDESS! NOW YOU WHO
SHOULD KNOW BETTER ARE
PERPETUATING THIS ABUSE
AND QUITE FRANKLY WE
WOMYN WON'T STAND FOR
IT ANYMORE.



AS A WHITE
MALE YOU CAN'T
POSSIBLY COMPREHEND
THE STRUGGLE OF
THOSE YOU
OPPRESS.

WHEREAS
WE THE
OPPRESSED
MUST
UNDERSTAND
YOU PERFECTLY
JUST TO
SURVIVE.



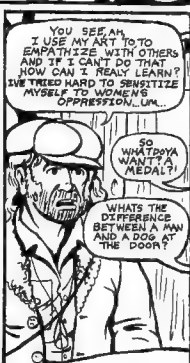
BUT THAT'S JUST IT!
AS A WHITE MALE I'M
TRYING TO COME TO
TERMS WITH MY ROLE
AS AN OPPRESSOR AND
TO REACH BEYOND IT!
THE ONLY WAY I KNOW
HOW TO UNDERSTAND
SOMETHING AND TO
COMMUNICATE IS WITH
MY PHOTOGRAPHY...

HEY! HEY!
ARE YOU
LISTENING?

PERF
ORIGINALS

UH,
O'MON
GANG...

MEN HAVE
NEVER LISTENED
TO WOMYN SO
WHY START NOW?



YOU SEE, AH,
I USE MY ART TO
EMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS
AND IF I CAN'T DO THAT
HOW CAN I REALLY LEARN?
I'VE TRIED HARD TO SENSITIZE
MYSELF TO WOMEN'S
OPPRESSION... UH...

SO
WHAT DO YA
WANT? A
MEDAL?

WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN A MAN
AND A DOG AT
THE DOOR?



WHEN YOU
LET THE DOG
IN IT STOPS
WHINING.

CHRIS, I REALLY DO
SYMPATHIZE, YOU THINK
YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING
POSITIVE, BUT IT'S HARMFUL!
YOUR WELL-MEANING
ATTEMPT TO PATRONIZE
WOMYN REVEALS YOU'RE
STILL HOPELESSLY WHITE
MALE BOURGEOISIE! YOU
MUST REALIZE THAT
YOUR KIND OF THINKING
LEADS TO ATROCITIES
LIKE THE MONTREAL
MASSACRE.



NO! I CAN'T ACCEPT
THAT! I AM NOT A MARC
LEPINE! I AM NOT LIKE
THAT!!

PUKE
THEATRE

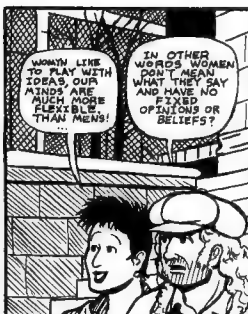
OF COURSE
YOU ARE, ALL
MEN ARE.

HEY!





YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE THOSE TWO SO SERIOUSLY. I KNOW THEY CAN BE A MARSH BUT THEY DON'T REALLY MEAN IT!



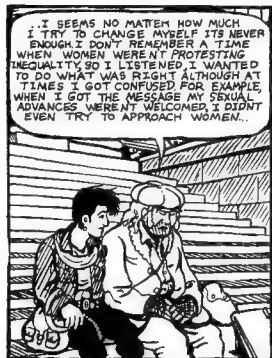
WOMEN LIKE TO PLAY WITH IDEAS, OUR MINDS ARE MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE THAN MEN'S!

IN OTHER WORDS WOMEN WHAT THEY SAY AND HAVE NO FIXED OPINIONS OR BELIEFS?



WELL, NO NOT EXACTLY ...

SUSAN I'M SORRY I CAUSED A SCENE, IT'S JUST THAT...



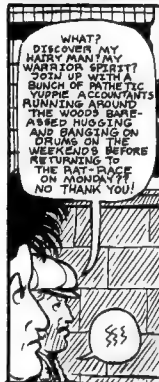
I SEEMS NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TRY TO CHANGE MYSELF ITS NEVER ENOUGH. I DON'T REMEMBER A TIME WHEN WOMEN WERE N'T PROTESTING INEQUALITY, SO I LISTENED. I WANTED TO DO WHAT WAS RIGHT ALTHOUGH AT TIMES I GOT CONFUSED FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN I GOT THE MESSAGE MY SEXUAL ADVANCES WEREN'T WELCOMED, I DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO APPROACH WOMEN...



FOR YEARS I THOUGHT THE WORST POSSIBLE THING I COULD DO TO A WOMAN WAS MAKE LOVE TO HER



WOW, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO WORK OUT. HAVE YOU CONSIDERED JOINING A NEWS GROUP?



WHAT? DISCOVER MY HARRY MAN? MY WARRIOR SPIRIT? JOIN UP WITH A BUNCH OF PATHETIC YUPPIE ACCOUNTANTS RUNNING AROUND THE WOODS BARE-ASSED HUGGING AND BANGING ON DRUMS ON THE WEEKEND BEFORE RETURNING TO THE RAT-RACE ON MONDAY?? NO THANK YOU!

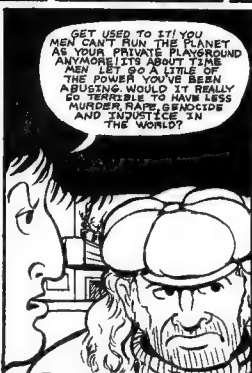


IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO EVEN THINK ABOUT MY ADVICE I WON'T BOTHER

UM, NO. I DIDN'T MEAN TO, TO AH DISMISS WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY. AH I'M-TA SORRY...



OH STOP BURBLING!! I WISH YOU'D STAND UP FOR YOURSELF FOR A CHANGE INSTEAD OF MELTING LIKE BUTTER EVERY TIME I BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH...













HEPCATS

"I want to read it, but I can't find it *anywhere!*"

Is that you? Well, you're not alone. HEPCATS is perhaps the most famous comic that no one has read. But if the success of our recent reprint volume is any indication, there are simply loads of new readers waiting to come on board the Hepwagon—if only they can find the right starting point. Double Diamond Press is giving the greatest comic fans alive—ah say, *Cerebus* readers, that is—the chance, finally, to start reading this elusive comic they've heard about, and heard about, and...



ANNOUNCING THE CEREBUS/HEPCATS HOLIDAY TELETHON
START TIME: 11:59 PM CENTRAL TIME; FRIDAY NIGHT 12/3/93
STOP TIME: 11:59 PM CENTRAL TIME, SUNDAY NIGHT 12/5/93

HEPCATS creator and publisher Martin Wagner will be staying up the entire 48-hour period of the first weekend of December, and hopes to talk to literally hundreds of *Cerebus* fans from all over the world. Dust off your Visas and Mastercards, forget those pesky "Innapennnuts don sell" retailers, and go right to the source!

FILL IN THE BACK ISSUE GAP WITH THE FIRST TWO VOLUMES OF THE HEPCATS REPRINT LIBRARY!

VOLUME 1: THE COLLEGIATE HEPCATS

The book that took the '93 Chicago Comic Con by storm! Dave Sim calls it "a kickass first volume." Even Don Thompson liked this 160-page collection of the earliest college *Hepcats* material, concluding with *Hepcats* #1 itself. The essential starting point for new readers. **\$12.00 ppd. paperback; \$25.00 ppd. deluxe hardcover.** Canada add \$2, foreign add \$4.

VOLUME 2: SNOWBLIND, PART I

Going to press in December, this 208-page volume reprints all of the unfindable early issues of Martin Wagner's startling graphic-bio of Erica. Collecting issues #3-#10 (#2 was an inbetween issue, to be re-released later), with several pages of corrected and revised art and 10 pages of deleted scenes. **\$17.00 ppd. paperback; \$30.00 deluxe hardcover.** Canada add \$2.50, foreign add \$5

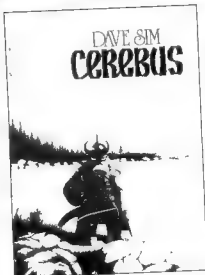
These two editions will get you up-to-date. Also available: subscriptions, original art, a T-shirt. Big hint: call early if you want a hardcover as they are VERY limited!

So, if you've been at all curious about *Hepcats*, mark the first weekend of December in red ink on your calendars, because the wait is over. Martin hopes to hear from *zillions* of you, all weekend, at all hours of the day and night. *Do NOT let him get a moment's sleep*—he may not be speaking English properly by Sunday afternoon, but he'll be happy. And so will you!

(512) 837.5545

Oh, yes. All callers will receive a free Self-Publishers Five-Way Megajam poster (Sim, Wagner, Smith, Doran, Owen) originally produced for retailers at the Diamond show in Atlanta in June 1993, and signed by Martin (you'll have to get the other autographs yourself, though).

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF



CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25 500 pages \$25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Reg Sopra, Jaka the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50 500 pages \$25

Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in Iest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Fligate, Blakey, the Regency Elf, Dirty Peagle and his brother Dirty Draw McGrew, Duke Leonard. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestian police.

CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II reprints Cerebus 52 to 111 1200 pages \$30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henri-Gutchen (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also in volume II is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.

JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136 500 pages \$25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150 250 pages \$17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes Norma Roach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS IN 1993:

FLIGHT reprinting Cerebus 151 to 162 250 pages (\$17)

and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from
Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) (\$2.25)

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.

Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2

519-576-7820

or

519-576-0610

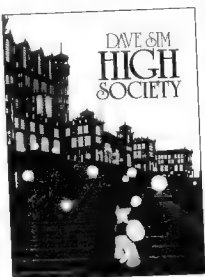
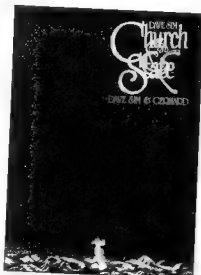




photo by Dave Sim

'Bunny-caught-in-the-
headlights' Revenge photo
The Real Colleen Doran
3am in my suite
Diamond Seminar '93



Victor Reid had exactly five hundred and fifty-six crowns remaining of his original advance payment for Ascension. Forever Palnu languished in the bottom drawer of his desk (good riddance, he thought to himself), incomplete save for a sample chapter, a much-corrected and modified outline and a few disconnected fragments. Côte d'Azur (or, rather, a number of tantalizing passages and

hastily scrawled notes) lounged seductively in various places around his study. Ignoring the latter was very much like forgetting Beth, a futile (albeit necessary) exercise in self-deception.

How had he come to this point in his life, he wondered, tapping the blank sheet of notepaper with the feathered end of his quill. What curious alignment of astrological bodies; what society-wide conspiracy had propelled him here into uncharted, undesired and undesirable waters?



For some years (sixteen, to be precise), Victor had been labouring in virtual obscurity on a series of historical fictions centered on the interwoven relationship of Cirinism and Kevillism in all geographic areas of Estarcion. Far from a new planetary configuration or universal conspiracy, it was the fact of Cirin's takeover of the city-state of Iest which had transformed his career (and, consequently, Victor himself). His modest and loyal following had begun to grow. As it did so, Victor had permitted himself to recognize only that he no longer had to worry about his ability to pay his monthly rent; that he was able to afford better quality notepaper and quills which lasted several pages instead of a few paragraphs.

As a result, That Black Day (as it was known to Victor in his innermost thoughts) had come as a complete surprise to him; That Black Day when he had entered his favourite reads store, *The Beguiled*, in search of a copy of his latest work, and had found it to be absent from its customary place: the rearmost section, lower left, second shelf from the bottom, under the designation 'Ephemera'. He had finally inquired if the store had failed to order it (an infrequent but not-altogether-unheard-of occurrence). The clerk had led him to an ornate, brightly-lit shelf near the front door, where he had proudly pointed to the work in question. 'Your new home,' he had declared, beaming. 'Popular Authors' read the sign, beaming. Popular authors. Victor had gone directly from *The Beguiled* to the nearest tavern and had proceeded to get very, very drunk, very, very quickly.

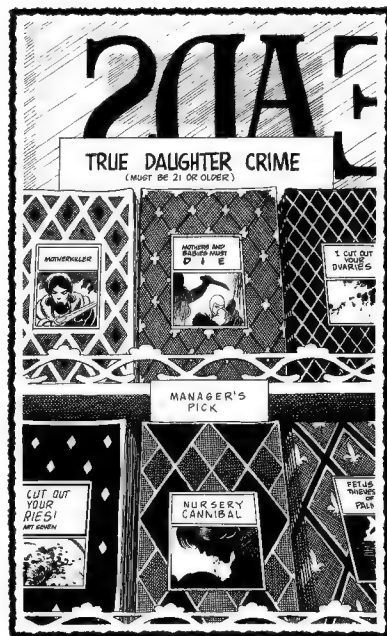
Over a period of several unproductive and liquor-sodden weeks he had made an uneasy peace with his new situation,

rationalising that the placement and status of his works fell outside of his jurisdiction and should, as a consequence, be outside of his concern. He began to joke at conferences and personal appearances that he viewed himself as the Least Popular of the Popular Authors. After a time, people stopped laughing at this *petit bon mot* and merely looked perplexed.

The effect of this on Victor was devastating and he had retreated into a sullen state of deliberate silence and gloom, wilfully ignoring his surroundings at promotional events and convocations. So morose and self-absorbed did he become that his mood infected the swelling ranks of his coterie of readers. They exchanged pleasantries with one another and bantered good-naturedly about Victor's symbolism and their favourites among his many characters; but as they approached the front of the autograph line, their conversation subsided into murmurs and whispers and, finally, into a grim silence which mirrored Victor's own. As a result, these processions came to resemble nothing so much as a line of mourners, paying their final respects to a recently departed friend of long-standing (it was not unusual for them to remark to one another on leaving his presence that Victor seemed 'very life like and natural').

When the requisite number of signatures had been duly rendered on copies of his work, small scraps of paper, as well as the occasional article of clothing and exposed limb, Victor further reinforced his status as the 'dearly departed' by doing exactly that: retreating, with unseemly haste, to his hotel room.

There, he would embrace the bottle of cognac which was mandated as part of his appearance fee. Having dispatched the better part its contents in short order, Victor would lie back on the bed, fully clothed, cross his hands over his chest and fall into a troubled, though dreamless, slumber. The absence of a priest, the discordant sound of his snoring and his inevitable awakening with a pounding headache and a desert-dry throat the only elements which were at variance with the perfect sanctity of the tableau which might have served as an altar piece in some mythical Church of Tarim (Literary Icon) over a small plaque bearing the title: His Final Rest.



The *Palnu* series had been, from the outset, an unsalvageable mess. Cirinism and Kevillism never having taken hold in that most independent and wide-open of frontier city-states, Victor had decided long ago that it merited a single read at best. He had envisioned that read as a straightforward morality tale concerning a fictitious member of the House of Tavers (Lady Howe, a widow with two children) and the effect upon her of Lord Julius' brief marriage to Astoria. He had crafted a simple cautionary tale around her as she wrestled with the Kevillist ideal of 'choice above all', documenting the gradual destruction this brings about in the life of a simple and good-hearted woman who, previously, had derived all of her joy and satisfaction from caring for her offspring. Cirin's occupational government had placed it very high on their list of 'recommended reads' shortly after the invasion. As this had taken place during one of Victor's week-long visits to the *Bull & Finch* he was ignorant of that fact, though the effect was proving inescapable.

Victor had always regarded illustrators as something between an unnecessary evil and a terminal malignancy in the world of reads publishing. There was a perverse streak within every one of them (Victor was certain of this) which compelled them to render everything within their engravings except that which was described in the author's text. First among equals in wilful desecration was M. Zulli, who lived in the next street over from Victor. When *Lady of Palnu* (upon which M. Zulli had been inflicted) was published, Victor had been horrified to discover that sweet, matronly, gray-haired Lady Howe, she of the rosy cheeks and even rosier disposition, had been rendered as a buxom harlot, with sultry gaze, painted lips and cascades of raven hair. It had been too much for Victor to bear, a final straw upon the haystack, and he had gone directly to the perpetrator's lair, there to demand satisfaction of the most extreme sort. Cowed and ashen in the face of Victor's fury, M. Zulli's housekeeper had, without demur, ushered the red-faced author directly to the work area on the second floor.

There, before Victor's eyes, motionless as a statue, wearing a form-fitting gown of black velvet, her hands pressed to her cheeks, her eyes and mouth frozen in astonishment, was the model who served as the basis for M. Zulli's Lady Howe. M. Zulli himself appeared completely unperturbed by the unannounced interruption.

'What can I do for you?' he asked, without looking up, hunched over his illustration table, his hand moving smoothly and meticulously in long parallel strokes.

Victor had introduced himself as the author of *Lady of Palnu*. He had then poured forth a litany of extravagant compliments on the subject of M. Zulli's artistic style, his attention to detail, his ability to capture and sustain a mood, the curiously affecting interplay of light and shadow that was a hallmark of his works.

'Mm,' Zulli had said. Like most members of his occupation, he was a man of few words, most of them unintelligible.

Politely, Victor had asked if he might be permitted to watch the master illustrator at work: he who had breathed such vivid life into Victor's humble tale.

'I guess. Just don't touch anything,' he acquiesced before lapsing into silence.

For a short while, Victor had maintained the pretense of scrutinizing the stubby, begrimed fingers and the bent and battered rendering implement. He had soon realized that Zulli had no more awareness of Victor's presence in the room than he did of the fact that the socks he wore were of different colours (one was a crimson and navy plaid, the other a light beige). Victor had quietly eased himself onto a small wooden stool after covering it with his handkerchief and contented himself with staring, unashamedly, at the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The studio had become a still-life: 'Illustrator, Author and *Modèle Surprise*'. Over the course of the next several hours, M. Zulli's right hand and forearm represented the only movement in the cavernous room.

Beth.

Her name was Beth. For several weeks, Victor was a regular visitor to the studio of M. Zulli, where he passed most of his afternoons. Zulli had paid him no more attention on his subsequent visits than he had on the first.

Victor had persuaded his publisher, House of Shadows, to draw up a contract for four more *Palnu* reads, each of which was to feature the soon-to-be redoubtable Lady Howe. They sold briskly, though confusion was widespread among his readership when Victor's sweet, matronly lead character become involved in a series of ever more wildly implausible adventures as a defender of good morals, who seemed always to be staggering through the seamier neighbourhoods of Palnu City in varying stages of *dishabille* at the conclusion of each chapter (and, as word of this new theme in Victor's work began to



spread, they sold very briskly indeed).

When M. Zulli would be called away to greet a visitor (most of whom, unlike Victor, were good enough to wait in the parlour) or when the illustrator would take one of his infrequent lunch breaks, Victor would engage Beth in conversation. Or, rather, he would *attempt* to engage Beth in conversation. Victor had discovered that models made illustrators seem eloquent by contrast. And so these conversations took the form of extended monologues on Victor's part on a wide variety of subjects, punctuated by a limited selection of grunts and shrugs on Beth's part (each, of course, ranging between the charming and the sublime) with one notable exception. The exception came on that fateful day when Victor, in his best and most chivalrous manner, had held forth on the subject of models and their financial compensation. He had pointed out that, without models, illustrations could not exist, and, further, without illustrations, reads could not exist. In short, he had concluded, it was impossible to overrate the importance of models to the literary world. Models, Authors and Illustrators were bound together; their shared fate was the cornerstone, nay, the very foundation of the burgeoning reads industry.

'Yeah?' Beth had said, gazing intently at Victor as if she were seeing him (really *seeing* him) for the first time.

He had fairly bounded home from that session, his feet scarcely touching the cobblestones, his heart brimming, spilling over with soon-to-be-required love.

And so it had been Another Black Day (it seemed to Victor that his existence consisted entirely of Black Days, strung like pearls on strands of ennui and uneventfulness) when he had arrived at M. Zulli's studio, only to discover a different model who vaguely resembled Beth, her clothes in disarray, her right hand demurely covering an exposed breast, frozen in mid-stagger.

'Uh. Where's Beth?' Victor had inquired.

'She wanted a share of my royalties,' said M. Zulli, turning away from his work and looking at Victor (really *looking* at him) for the first time. 'So I fired her.'

Pleading a crushing workload, Victor had taken his leave of M. Zulli's studio and home for the last time.

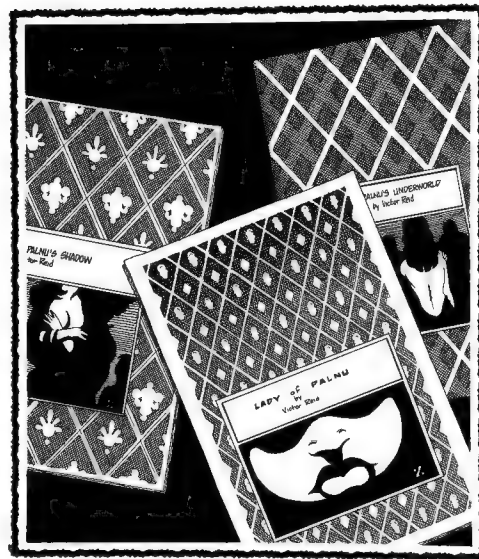
He had set up an appointment with his publisher at House of Shadows and had explained that, virtually overnight, he had developed an insoluble writer's block which made the completion of *Forever Palnu* an impossibility. Since *In Palnu's Shadow* was

now entering its third printing in as many weeks, Victor's publisher took a rather dim view of his favourite author (a status Victor had achieved without his knowledge somewhere between the first printing's release date and the receipt of reorders for the second) adopting such a defeatist attitude. In fact, he viewed Victor's defeatism in the same light with which he regarded his printing presses when they insisted on discharging buckled and torn reams of expensive paper instead of clean, saleable and perfectly replicated copies: as a personal affront, maliciously intended.

It was quite impossible to release Victor from his contract, he said. They had already advertised *Forever Palnu* and *Crimes of Palnu* (this, of course, wasn't true; advertisements for House of Shadows reads were never placed until at least two months after publication. Victor's publisher saw no reason to waste good money on advertising until he could be certain that a read was successful enough to warrant it). Victor was adamant. There would be no *Forever Palnu* and there would be no *Crimes of Palnu*. He said he was prepared to return the total advance of twenty crowns which had been rendered on both titles; he would write a check that very moment (this, of course, wasn't true. Leaving aside the fact that Victor had left his chequebook at home, he had exactly eight crowns and seven copper bits left to his name, assuming his grocer hadn't yet attempted to cash the cheque he had written that morning). Victor's publisher asked what compensation Victor intended for all of the advertising and promotion money he had invested, all of the money he had already spent on designs and special in-store displays (in point of fact that amount was exactly eight crowns and seven copper bits less than Victor had in his account, pending resolution of the grocer question). What do you suggest, Victor asked, fuming inwardly. I don't like being unreasonable, said Victor's publisher (this, of course, wasn't true. He liked very much to be unreasonable so long as being unreasonable produced lucrative results). Suppose you sign an agreement assigning House of Shadows all rights and title to *Lady of Palnu*, *In Palnu's Shadow* and *Palnu's Underworld* and we'll just close the book on *Forever Palnu* and *Crimes of Palnu*.

Fine, Victor had said; he just wanted to be rid of all reminders of Beth, M. Zulli and the whole sordid mess. Victor's publisher stood up from behind his desk and walked to his office door.

I'll have the agreement drawn up and ready for you to sign tomorrow morning, he said.



Fine, Victor had said, sufficiently irritated that he wasn't about to expend any of his creative energies in coming up with a synonymous rejoinder. And with that, he had left House of Shadows for the last time.

Victor's now-former publisher summoned one of his messengers and told him to make a reservation for a private room for two at the Café Royale; he wanted it lavish, but intimate. Victor's now-former publisher suddenly felt like celebrating.

He then summoned a second messenger and told him to relay a message to his wife, informing her that he would be working quite late and had no idea when he might be home.



And so it was that Victor had discharged his contractual obligations to the well-regarded but economically unsound (in the world of reads publishing the two were virtually synonymous) House of Shadows.

Ignorant of the extent and scope of his new popularity (though, by the same token, now something of a connoisseur of various cognacs and their respective abilities to induce and enhance slumber), he now prepared himself for a shopping expedition. Metaphorically speaking, he intended to take the wicker basket of his literary future to the entrepreneurial fresh produce stalls of the free marketplace. And there, having thumped the skins of viability, having poked the firmness of verisimilitude and having examined all contractual undersides for the tell tale bruising of malfeasance, Victor would then endeavour to make his selection. And having, by this means, formed a more perfect union of market-share musculature and the untapped potential of his literary prowess (or a close approximation thereof), Victor was certain that he could then return to the careful honing of his chosen craft without further impediment or distraction.

In short, Victor was going to a Reads Trade Show to find a new publisher.



Trade shows were a new variable in the ever-more-complicated world of reads publishing, distinct from the smaller, reader-oriented conferences in that attendance was limited to publishers, distributors and proprietors of reads stores. Though not officially sanctioned, authors and illustrators had recently been granted limited access to the social events, so long as they behaved and cleaned up after themselves.

Victor had been at a literary dinner some months before where Henry Wotton had

held forth, at some length, on the subject of trade shows (there was a general consensus, at the time, that Wotton was the only author of sufficiently perverse sensibility to actually attend such an event).

Wotton had begun with a few innocuous observations on the various definitions of the word 'trade'. It could encompass a simple exchange of one commodity for another, between individuals. It defined an occupation which was not well-regarded enough to be called a profession. In the world of business, it was used to describe an individual company's total transactions involving commodities, services and currency. In the many civilised countries and city-states of Estarcion, 'trade' was the term used to describe the internal exchanges of goods and services and currency among its populace, as well as larger exchanges with other peoples and other governments.

Of course, he added, 'trade' was also a term used in the field of prostitution.

It was an article of faith with Victor and others that Henry Wotton, at a specific point in any given conversation, would cross the clearly defined border between the appropriate and the inappropriate. Several of the ladies at the table emitted small, mewling noises comparable to those uttered by kittens in protest of rough treatment. Several of the gentlemen scowled disapprovingly in Wotton's direction. These reactions would have been sufficient to drive anyone of good sense, hastily, from table to domicile, there to compose notes of abject apology in the vain hope of salvaging what remained of their societal status. As Henry Wotton had no societal status to speak of, these reactions were completely without effect.

'Rough trade', he continued (at this, Victor could hear a low rumbling sound rising in the throat of the gentleman to his left), was a term used to describe males and females in the aforementioned field whose aspect was of the lowest and meanest sort, violent, bestial creatures who brought those qualities to bear on the world's oldest profession.

Anyway, Wotton had said (recognizing that he had stretched the boundaries of propriety at the staid old Café Royale to a new frontier, hitherto undreamt), I attended one of these . . . trade shows recently. Here he had added such a salacious emphasis to the word 'trade' that the new and unpredictable connection (a conversational trick for which he was notorious) was made, instantly, in everyone's mind. His monologue picked up momentum as he described a well-known reads publisher



who had approached him at the 'get-acquainted' reception. He added the same emphasis to 'get-acquainted' that he had used to underscore 'trade' and several of his listeners (Victor included) had begun to smile, in spite of themselves.

'The fellow expressed interest in my future plans,' said Wotton, warming to his subject, 'and enquired as to their nature. I told him that while I had no *specific* future plans, I had every intention of continuing in my present occupation. I then asked if I was given to understand that he himself had certain . . . interests in that area as well. He could scarcely conceal his eagerness. Oh, yes, he said, *many* interests . . . many . . . *varied* interests. I thought the adjective a trifle impertinent, but I replied with a practised equanimity. Variety, I said, is the spice of life, or so I am told. At this, I lowered my lashes and peered at him with a demure, but significant, sidelong glance. I think, he said, his voice deepening with drama, that, perhaps, our interests might be . . . mutual, then. All things are possible, one supposes, I replied diffidently, hoping to cool his ardour, which had become too demonstratively apparent and was, as a result, attracting the unwelcome attention of bystanders. I think I am safe in saying, were our interests to lie in the same direction then an . . . arrangement might be mutually beneficial, he persisted, a slight tremor evident in his voice and a fine mist of perspiration forming on his upper lip. I had discreetly removed a small fan from my vest pocket as he spoke and, snapping it open with a flourish, and using it to cover the lower half of my face, I replied, indeed? You *must* tell me more. Before he could clarify his assertions, we were joined by another publisher of my acquaintance whom I greeted warmly. The first fellow bristled visibly at this unwelcome intrusion. So, the two of you have had . . . past dealings, then, he said, his voice dripping venom. Oh, yes, I said, casually dropping my shoulder and in the process exposing a small expanse of shirt between my lapel and my tie. Many dealings. Many . . . satisfactory dealings. Many, the newcomer had agreed, beaming contentedly. We were just discussing my . . . future plans, I informed him, lightly fanning myself. How fortuitous, the new arrival had murmured, the very thing that was uppermost in my mind in coming here.'

Much of the rich detail of the rest of Wotton's story had been lost to Victor in the general hilarity which greeted each new embellishment and improvisation.

He did remember that by the story's conclusion, Wotton had lowered his jacket

on both sides to mid-bicep and that the three of them had departed the reception, Wotton with a publisher on each arm. They had adjourned to the author's rooms for a 'friendly drink' before 'consummating' the lucrative details of their respective publishing agreements.



Victor had arrived at the Regency for the fourth annual Davis, Diamond & Madison Seminar, Roundtable and Sales Conference (fortunately a hotel employee had found this lengthy appellation as confusing as Victor had and had mercifully added 'Reads Trade Show' in parentheses to the listing on the hotel directory) shortly after sunset.

At the registration desk, he had been provided with a shopping bag that was the size of a small suitcase, which contained his *Guide to Seminar, Roundtable and Conference Events, Rules of Conduct*, a current catalogue of Davis, Diamond & Madison 'product' (which was as thick as *Victor Reid's Complete Works* would have been, had such a volume existed), as well as a full transcript of the previous year's Roundtable (under the prodigious and unwieldy title of *Saturation: Being an Examination of Economic Forces at Work in the Reads Marketplace*, with subheadings 'Hot versus Coolest: When Titans Clash', 'Extracting That Last Copper Bit: Crowbar versus Tongs' and 'Unnumbered T'Capmin Bank Accounts: Towards a Secure Future').

In addition, Victor had been given a name badge which read 'Hello my name is Victoria Reis'. Attached to it was a small blue ribbon inscribed with the word 'Vendor'. Grimacing slightly, Victor was in the process of affixing it to his lapel and preparing to launch the next phase of his literary career as 'Victoria Reis, Vendor-at-Large', when he nearly collided with an extremely tall individual who had appeared as if from thin air.

'I'm very excited,' the tall individual had said.

Victor had laughed out loud, Henry Wotton's reminiscence being very much on his mind.

'Are you?' he asked.

'Oh, yes,' the tall individual had replied, diplomatically ignoring Victor's unseemly outburst. *Very* excited. I'm Denis Eastman, publisher of Kevin's Kitchen Enterprises. I've been following your work for years. All of us have at Kevin's Kitchen. We're *all* very, very excited.'

The mental image conjured by this assertion was almost too much for poor Victor and it was only through the greatest



self-possession that he was able to stifle a maniacal fit, of giggling. Once he had contained himself, but before he could venture a reply, one of the marble pillars had detached itself from a nearby wall and edged closer to him. Attached to the pillar, at Victor's eye level, was a name tag which read 'Mike Prosserman, Publisher, Vertigo Horse'. Suddenly, Victor realized that it wasn't a marble pillar at all, but one of the tallest human beings he had ever seen in his life, whose cream-coloured suit, fair complexion and light blond hair had merged with the beige column against which he had been leaning so thoroughly as to cause him to vanish from sight like a chameleon on a damp log.

'I think I can give you the big push you need,' the pillar had informed him.

'Excuse me?' Victor had said, now thoroughly lost in the land of Wotton imagery and seized by a claustrophobic panic as the crowd pressed the two giants closer to him, effectively blocking his view of the room (as well as most of the light from the large chandelier overhead).

'Vertigo Horse specializes in three things' (these he proceeded to tick off on fingers which, at close proximity, appeared to be the length of Victor's forearm). 'One, the big push; two, proper handling; three, hands-on participation. I think you'll find us the best choice for handling you properly,' he said by way of conclusion, handing Victor his card.

Victor felt a definite kinship with the embossed silhouette of a horse's head and the series of concentric rings vanishing into its furrowed brow. He wrestled with a reply, but all of Wotton's rejoinders seemed both inadequate and inappropriate to the situation. He could almost feel a price tag hanging from his forehead with 'Reduced to Clear' marked upon it in bold letters.

'Are you staying in the hotel?' the pillar asked.

'Er — yes, I am,' Victor had stammered.

'Why don't I come up to your room with my staff? I'm sure they'll want to be in on this.'

'I'm . . . that is . . . I haven't checked in yet. Some . . . uh . . . mix-up at the desk.'

'I'm in rooms four-fifty, four-fifty-two. Come up tonight for a drink after the exhibit room closes. We'll do business.'

And, with that, the pillar was gone. Shaken, Victor had forgotten entirely about Denis Eastman, who startled him by whispering in his ear:

'I'm not as big as Vertigo Horse, but I'm sure I can get the job done for you. Think

about it.'

And, with that, Denis Eastman was gone as well.

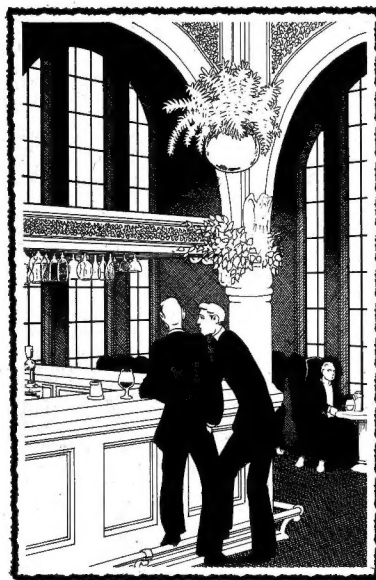
Somewhere, Victor thought, somewhere in this hotel there is a bottle of cognac with my name on it.

And, with that, Victor was gone as well.



The hotel bar made the lobby seem underpopulated by contrast. It had taken Victor the better part of an hour to edge his way a few yards towards the far wall where a pyramid of bottles and suspended glasses, visible over a sea of heads, marked the location of the oasis he sought. The closer he got, the slower his progress and the more the commonest of courtesies (his own included) became an endangered species. At last, his intolerance of large crowds and his reluctance to use the force necessary to advance his position overcame his thirst and he turned to leave. At that point, he discovered that departure was only marginally easier than advancement and he was forced to move sideways along lines of least resistance as he sought an opening in the wall of human flesh.

For a period of some minutes Victor found himself pressed against an individual bearing a publisher's badge (again, taller than any human being of Victor's acquaintance; he began mentally composing an outline for a fantasy read: *Land of the Giant Publishers*) with the single word 'Deviant' scrawled across it in shaky crimson letters. At first Victor had thought the fellow was endeavouring to address him, but soon realized that his cold and penetrating gaze was focussed firmly in the middle distance. He was rolling two metal balls in his left hand and waxing eloquent on the subject of strawberries. Specifically, *his* strawberries. From what Victor could gather, someone or other had taken the fellow's strawberries without his knowledge or consent, but that he had a good idea as to the perpetrator's identity and whereabouts. His strawberries were much admired, it seemed, and consequently represented a great temptation both to the perpetrator and other unsavory characters of his acquaintance. As an aside, a kind of historical footnote, the fellow mentioned that he himself had been instrumental, a pioneer of sorts, in the introduction of strawberries into Estarcion and a key figure in their renewed popularity at a time when there had been a real danger that strawberries, as we knew them, might have ceased to exist altogether had it not been for his intercession. He had even given some strawberries, at a point in the now



distant past, to an individual whose identity he was not at liberty to divulge (whom he proceeded to describe in such specific terms that there could be no doubt as to his identity: best-selling author and illustrator Ronin Sin). While he in no way regretted the gift of these strawberries, nor did he begrudge the unnamed individual his own substantial strawberry holdings which had been acquired through the intervening years, it troubled him, troubled him deeply that . . .

It was at this juncture that Victor found himself swept to one side by a flying wedge composed of trade show attendees who had elected to attempt a final 'death or glory' assault in the direction of the pyramid of bottles looming on the horizon. When he recovered his balance, Victor found himself face-to-face with another publisher (this one of uncharacteristically traditional proportions), Kim Grinch of Hey, Buddy Enterprises. Without preamble or salutation, he asked if Victor had had any dealings with (and here he named an editor who had recently left his employ). Victor acknowledged that he had recently had lunch with the woman in question and several mutual friends and acquaintances. A look of keen and malevolent interest had taken hold of Grinch's boyish features and he had launched into a series of stinging indictments (this was no mere exaggeration, for each of his assertions had been prefaced with 'The Accused did, on the date in question . . .'; 'The Accused did wilfully cause to . . .'; 'The Accused did with malice aforethought . . .' and so on).

It was opportune that at that very moment several attendees had discovered one of their number attempting to conceal a half-filled tankard of ale and a wrestling match had ensued for possession of it which had opened up a small stretch of carpeted floor adjacent to Victor's position. Stepping nimbly into this unexpected opening, Victor might have made real progress to the exit had not his path been blocked by yet another publisher (though only slightly taller than Victor he appeared to weigh as much as Eastman and Prosserman combined) waving a packet of cigarettes.

'No, thank you,' Victor said, 'I don't smoke.'

'No, no,' the fellow protested. 'The card. The . . . card.'

He indicated one of those small cardboard representations of a figure from the world of competitive sport which were offered as premiums on certain brands of tobacco products.

'Your next . . . read,' he gasped (though his lungs doubtless consumed a disproportionately large volume of the available air, that was still a commodity for which, at the moment, demand outstripped supply by a wide margin), 'on the . . . backs . . . eighty . . . cards . . . limited . . . autographed.'

Alas (though such a rapid sequence of serendipitous events would have stretched the credulity of the reader of even the most melodramatic of reads), Dame Fortune smiled upon Victor once more. A near-sighted Administrator of Records for one of the larger distribution concerns chose that moment to mistake the publisher for a small sofa and, as the two of them plunged forward, with identical expressions of complete astonishment, a substantial comingling of assistant editors, production managers, art directors and a retail liaison was obliged, domino-like, to follow suit.

Victor made good his escape. Half-walking, half-running down the hallway, he was joined, very much in the athletic spirit of things, by still and yet another publisher who, trotting along-side, said, 'You don't know me, but I want to offer you the contract-of-a-lifetime for your next read.' Recollecting that this had been his avowed purpose in attending the Trade Show in the first place, Victor slowed down to listen.

'I want to offer you everything,' the fellow was saying, his eyes bright with some manner of entrepreneurial fever. 'Everything. Every last copper bit that comes in will be yours and yours alone. I won't keep anything.'

'That's wonderful,' Victor said. 'But—what will you live on? How will you pay your printer?'

Victor watched, sympathetically, as the light vanished from the man's eyes, as he sagged within his tailored suit like a punctured balloon. Without a word, the fellow had turned and walked away; out through the Regency's ornate, polished doors; out into the grim, dark night; out into the swirling snow; where he was soon lost from view.

